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Leader of Contras Describes Contacts With White House

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MIAMI, Aug. 13—The anti-Sandinista rebel movement's chief political figure said today that he has met regularly with several National Security Council members, including frequent contacts this spring during the Reagan administration's successful effort to renew U.S. funding for the Nicaraguan insurgents.

Adolfo Calero, president of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, the main U.S.-backed guerrilla group, said that one member of this White House foreign policy group, Marine Lt. Col. Oliver North, met with the rebels twice last year in Honduras.

Calero said North's biggest help came this spring, when he arranged

a meeting with President Reagan for Calero and two other figures among the contras, as the rebels are known in Nicaragua.

In addition to contacts with North, Calero said he had a number of sessions with Raymond Burgardt, Constantine Menges and Jackie Tillman of the White House Latin American staff that operates under national security adviser Robert C. McFarlane.

A spokeswoman for the National Security Council, Karna Small, said none of the four named by Calero could be reached for comment.

In an interview here, Calero depicted the meetings as routine, in the same category as his frequent meetings with sympathetic citizens, members of Congress and their staff aides. He said reports portraying North as a key military and fund-raising adviser since Central Intelligence Agency financing was suspended last year are "silly."

These reports had raised questions of whether the Reagan administration sidestepped congressional restrictions on government support for the rebels, who received about

\$80 million in CIA backing until the cutoff. President Reagan said Thursday that no laws have been broken and pledged to cooperate with Congress in making sure current legislation is adhered to.

"We don't need to compromise U.S. government people," Calero said. "We know their limits. And if we don't know them, they certainly do." Calero said he met half a dozen times with North this spring. Congress, which refused the aid earlier, authorized \$27 million in "nonlethal" aid last month, without clearly defining what fits into that category.

"When contact really started was during this period of congressional activity," Calero said.

Calero said North visited insurgent leaders last year at least twice in Honduras, where the rebels have their headquarters and base camps in cooperation with the Honduran Army. The first time, in the spring of 1984 just after Congress had vetoed further CIA funding, the White House official sought to reassure rebels that U.S. support for their guerrilla war against the Nicaraguan government would go on, according to Calero and Edgar Chamorro, a former rebel leader who also was present.

"But he did not say anything about breaking the law," Calero added, describing North as "a devout Christian" sympathetic to the insurgent cause.

Calero, Alfonso Robelo and Arturo Cruz, who form a three-man rebel umbrella group called Nicaraguan Opposition Union, met briefly with Reagan in the White House on April 4, Calero recalled, at the behest of North.

Neither North nor the other National Security Council officials have provided advice about military affairs, Calero said. Tactical military decisions are taken by the Nicaraguan Democratic Force com-

mander, former colonel Enrique Bermudez, and by commanders on the ground inside Nicaragua, he added. The group's civilian leadership advises only on broader questions, such as whether it is politically profitable to attack such targets as electricity generators, he declared.

Rebel leaders have explained in the past that radio communications between field commanders in Nicaragua and Bermudez at his Honduras headquarters frequently are spotty, reducing the possibility of close command control in any case.

Calero, who since the CIA cutoff has handled most weapons purchases for the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, said he has worked with several international arms dealers, sometimes through a long-time American friend retired from the government. Neither North nor other National Security Council officials have been involved, he added.

A number of arms dealers have sought out the guerrilla force with offers, Calero said. But he added that he has settled on two or three with whose owners he has developed a trust. Calero, who managed a Coca-Cola bottling plant before leaving Managua at the end of 1982, said he has found an unexpected degree of confidence in the world of arms dealers, including what he said was a large purchase of automatic rifles on credit.

Despite repeated questioning by reporters since the CIA cutoff, Calero has declined to reveal sources of his arms purchases or details on how shipment and government export authorizations, such as end-user certificates, have been obtained. At the receiving end, the Honduran Army has cooperated by authorizing unloading and helping transport equipment to rebel camps along the border, according to Honduran and U.S. officials.

Guatemalan authorities also have cooperated in at least one shipment, according to rebel sources.

Similarly, Calero has declined to reveal the sources of his funding since CIA financing dried up a year ago. Without providing specifics, he said today that the force has raised about \$15 million since last summer from private individuals and "governmental sectors overseas."